

ההבדל בין הקנאה והנחלה הוא עצום. המקנה מעביר, אמנם, את החפץ לרשותו של הקונה, אבל העברת רשות זו, אינה יוצרת שום יחס אישי ושום קשר פנימי בין המקנה והקונה. מה שאין כן בהנחלה. המנחיל מעמיד את הנוחל תחתיו. והנוחל קם תחתיו של המנחיל. ומתוך כך ההנחלה יוצרת יחס פנימי בין המנחיל והנוחל. וזו היא הרבותא של הפסוק "כבוד החכמים ינחלו." פסוק זה בא ללמדנו, כי אין החכמה מקנה את הכבוד לבעליה, אלא שהיא מנחילה לו את הכבוד.

הרב יצחק הוטנר, פחד יצחק: שבועות, טז:

The difference between a grant (*hakna'ah*) and a legacy (*hanhalah*) is vast. A grantor indeed transfers the object to the possession of the grantee, but such a transfer does not create a personal relationship or internal bond between the grantor and grantee. This is not true of a legacy. There, the benefactor appoints the beneficiary in his stead, and the beneficiary assumes the status of his benefactor. Thus, a legacy forges an intimate relationship between benefactor and beneficiary.

This is the novel idea expressed by the verse "Honor is the legacy of the wise" (Proverbs 3:35). The verse teaches us that wisdom does not simply *grant* honor to the wise; rather, wisdom gives honor as a *legacy* to those who possess it.

Rabbi Yitzhak Hutner, *Paḥad Yitzḥak* (*Shavuot*), 16:10

Contents

Preface	1
1. Reuben (<i>Reuven</i>)	13
2. Excursus: Textual Evidence for Boundary Determination of <i>Nahalat Reuven</i>	47
3. Simeon (<i>Shimon</i>)	55
4. Levi	83
5. Judah (<i>Yehudah</i>)	109
6. Issachar (<i>Yissakhar</i>)	131
7. Zebulun (<i>Zevulun</i>)	159
8. Dan	183
9. Naphtali	209
10. Gad	229
11. Asher	249
12. Joseph (<i>Yosef</i>)	265
13. Manasseh (<i>Menasheh</i>)	275
14. Ephraim	297
15. Benjamin (<i>Binyamin</i>)	315
Glossary of Commonly Used Terms	341
Bibliography	343
List of Abbreviations and Primary Sources	347
Archaeological Periods of Israel through the First Temple Era	351
Acknowledgments	353

Preface

What I present here is not an academic study, or a travel guide, or a biblical commentary. It is, rather, an act of committing to record years of reflection on the dynamic interplay between text and land.

This book was born in the Judean Desert, at the northern tip of the Dead Sea. I was guiding a group through the ruins of Qumran, the ancient commune whose residents wrote and stashed the famous Dead Sea Scrolls in the surrounding limestone caves two thousand years ago. Much of my daily work involved this era of Jewish history, when sects fought for control of the Second Temple and the Roman threat of conquest loomed large.

It was during the ice cream break that I suddenly had intimations of a new direction for research and thought. I had turned my back to the caves for a few minutes, gazing out over the Dead Sea to the mountains beyond. Moabite, Amorite, Ammonite, I recited to myself, automatically checking off the range of ancient civilizations that had dwelled in those hills. Israelite . . . the tribes of Reuben and Gad – and then, the fleeting thought that would reframe my presentation of the Land of Israel and influence my work for the next few years: a land divided among tribes must reflect in its apportionment the varied personalities of its owners.

There is something preternaturally intimate in the Bible's presentation of a person's relationship to the land. When Jacob fled the wrath of his slighted brother, Esau, he *encountered* the place where he was to camp for the night: “*va-yifga ba-makom*” (Genesis 28:11). Encountering implies something more than casual

meeting; it implies confrontation, contact – a rendezvous with an entity that intrigues us with its mystery, yet is comfortingly familiar at the same time. Those who encounter the land have a relationship with the land.

I believe this highlights an essential truth. Every person yearns to encounter the land; it is as natural as the relationship between mother and child: “for from dust were you taken, and to dust shall you return.” What is it that we are truly seeking from mother, and from land? Erich Fromm explains that mother does far more than preserve the child’s life and growth, but “instills in the child a love for living, which gives him the feeling: it is good to be alive, it is good to be a little boy or girl, it is good to be on this earth!”¹

Fromm himself used land as an apt metaphor to describe a mother’s love:

The promised land (land is always a mother symbol) is described as “flowing with milk and honey.” Milk is the symbol of the first act of love, that of caring and affirmation. Honey symbolizes the sweetness of life, the love for it and the happiness in being alive.²

Mother, our first and most primal relationship, gives us both sustenance and *joie de vivre*. Land does the same. How good it is to be on this earth! This joyous sense is heightened for the Children of Israel in *Eretz Yisrael*, the archetypal land of “milk and honey” – of abundant blessings and sweet meaningfulness. They are not only sustained through their land; they find the sweet contentedness of *home* in her borders, as right and as at home as in their mother’s embrace.

And yet it is not only the primal connection to the earth that is part of the human condition; we are also drawn to a particular place because of its qualities, some quantifiable, some nebulously

1. Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (Cambridge, MA: Harper, 2006), 50.

2. *ibid.*

sensed. As I gazed across the sea at *Naḥalat Reuven*, the region of the ancestral homeland apportioned to the tribe descended from Jacob's son Reuben, I wondered about all twelve of these regions, *naḥalot*, and the tribes who dwelled therein. Was there some essential connection between the individual natures of the tribes and the territory each called its own? Did each tribe feel that maternal sense of rightness in its own territory, and not in the others? The diminutive swath of *Eretz Yisrael* offers mountain and desert, coast and plain. Different parts of the land inspire and resonate in different ways. From my vantage point in *Naḥalat Yehudah*, I speculated: perhaps the specific tract of land allotted to each tribe resonated with that tribe's particular culture. Perhaps there was a design to the land apportionment, rooted in the different characters of each tribe.

Jewish tradition seems to take for granted that it is so. At the closing of the Book of Genesis, as Jacob blessed each son in turn, the blessing was not for the person standing before him, but for the entire tribe that each son was to sire. Each tribe's destiny was couched in this encounter between father and son: "Gather and I will tell you what will befall you at the end of days" (Genesis 48:1). Future descendants of each of Jacob's twelve sons acquired (and sometimes overcame) the same characteristic behavioral traits as their forefather, and patterns established in the lives of the original sons emerged again in later generations. Moses's blessings, at the end of the Book of Deuteronomy, echoed those bestowed by Jacob, often reinforcing the particular message, sometimes altering the vision based on events that had transpired. These two sets of blessings defined the essence of each tribe, and the allusions within the blessings to their specific land allotments implied a unity of destiny, character, and *naḥalah*.

Thus, the apportionment of the *naḥalot* was neither haphazard nor primarily politically motivated. The more dominant and populous tribes received larger tracts, as the verse in Numbers

commanded: “Let the numerous one receive a bigger allotment, and the smaller one, a smaller allotment; each one according to his count shall his *naḥalah* be given” (26:54). But this kind of pragmatism was not the sum and total consideration when divvying up the land. If it were, why would God Himself need to have been involved?

Only by *goral* [lots] shall the land be divided; according to the names of their fathers’ tribes shall they inherit. According to the lot shall one’s *naḥalah* be divided, between the numerous and the few.

Numbers 26:55–56

This *goral* method was a divine lottery of sorts, as expanded upon in the Talmud:

And it [the Land] was only divided by lot, as it is said, “By lot shall the land be divided” (Numbers 26:55). It was only divided by way of the Urim ve-Tumim. . . .³ How was this effected? Elazar (the High Priest) was wearing the *Urim ve-Tumim* while Joshua and all Israel stood before him. An urn [containing the names] of the tribes and an urn containing descriptions of the boundaries were placed before him. Guided by divine inspiration, he gave directions, exclaiming: “Zebulun will be drawn and the boundary lines of Acco will be drawn!” He then vigorously shook the urn of the tribes and Zebulun came up in his hand. He vigorously shook the urn of the boundaries and the boundary lines of Acco came up in his hand. Guided again by divine inspiration, he gave directions, exclaiming: “Naphtali will be drawn and the boundary lines of Gennesaret will be drawn!” He then vigorously shook the urn of the tribes and Naphtali came up in his hand. He vigorously shook the

3. The *Urim ve-Tumim* was a divination method utilizing the High Priest’s breastplate.

urn of the boundaries, and the boundary lines of Gennesaret came up in his hand. And so it was with every tribe.

Bava Batra 122a⁴

In this way, *Eretz Yisrael* was divinely apportioned, and the tribal populations clearly factored into the division.⁵ Ramban (Nachmanides) offered a similar reconciliation, understanding that each tribe received an equal share by divine lottery, after which the given *naḥalah* was reasonably divided within the tribe according to clan size. However it is parsed in its details, the Talmudic explanation of this lottery defied assigning any randomness to the procedure: tribal divisions were to be by lot, with God Himself⁶ deciding the territorial destinies of the tribes.⁷

I set to researching the connections between *shevet* (tribe) and *naḥalah* by first investigating the character of each tribe and its patriarch. As my course of study developed, I discovered that each tribe had an identifiable personality, with dominant, definitive traits. Nature and nurture worked in tandem to form the biblical personality, so elements like birth order, formative circumstances, and family dynamics influenced each son of Jacob as much as innate, raw abilities, tendencies, and weaknesses did. As I sifted through the rabbinic material, as well as other ancient sources, such as the Apocryphal literature and exegetical works of Josephus and Philo, emergent recurrent motifs allowed me

4. For a corroborating account, see *Yerushalmi, Yoma* 4, 41b. In *Antiquities*, 5:1:21–23, Josephus suggests that representatives of the nation surveyed the land for many months, finally presenting to Joshua nine and a half portions that were equal in quality if not in size. By concluding that these portions were then cast as lots, Josephus preserves within his biblical paraphrase the divine element of *naḥalah* apportionment.

5. Rashi, Numbers 26:54.

6. It was either God or Jacob – the midrash states that on his deathbed, Jacob determined which *naḥalot* should be apportioned to each tribe. So that the allusions embedded within the blessings be divinely affirmed, God decreed that the assignments be made by lot (*Tan. Pinḥas* 6; *BaR* 21:9).

to assign to each tribe a specific trait based on the nature of its founding father. No character portrait can ignore the complexities inherent to the human personality, but each tribe can be typified by one essential trait. I then examined the character of the tribe's *naḥalah*, which in turn led me to explore possible historical and conceptual ties of the tribe to its particular land holdings.

Given these considerations, this work is based in no small part on the Talmudic approach above that the *naḥalot* were apportioned by divine hand, implying that the specific qualities of any given *naḥalah* were perfectly suited to those who dwelled within it. But even for those who cannot accept the doctrine of divine allotment, recognition of a certain connection between a region and those who inhabit it justifies an examination into the nature of that connection. Setting aside the philosophical pickle of whether the territory inspired the tribe or the tribe inspired the territory, we may begin to examine the underlying bonds between the tribe and its *naḥalah*.

I conclude this section with the thoughts of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch regarding a single nation composed of disparate tribes:

This people is to consist of diverse tribes of differing traits, while maintaining complete unity. . . . This people should represent the agricultural nation, the merchant nation, the warrior nation, the nation of scholars. . . . [I]t should demonstrate for all to see that the one great mission . . . does not depend on a particular vocation or trait. . . . The division of the nation into diverse tribes, and the resulting division of the Land into different provinces for the different tribes, whose distinctiveness is thus to be retained, is what is indicated here [in the verse: a community of peoples]. Without the division into diverse tribes, all distinctiveness would be absorbed in the consolidated mass of the nation as a whole, just as the land would be

divided among the nation as a whole and not according to different tribes.

Hirsch, Genesis 48:3–6

It is my sincerest hope that this contribution to biblical and Land of Israel studies encourages further encounters between the Jewish people, in all their marvelous diversity, and their land.

Methodology/Structure

I initially envisioned this book as a casual read. As I delved into these twelve personalities and uncovered their bond with the land, however, I realized that I could not present the *shevatim* without their complexities. I strove for a tone that mixes chatty and philosophical, designing this book to be good company, with enough substance for further thought.

The primal patterns set in motion by the sons of Jacob reverberated throughout history with startling consistency. It is the emergent complexity of the layers of history, initially formulated in the blessings bestowed by Jacob on each son and realized over the course of the evolution from son to tribe, that is examined on these pages.

This work presents a new way of thinking about – and experiencing – the interplay of text and land. Many tour Israel with Bible in hand, but to tour with a deeper understanding of tribal character, and how that character was realized by the contours of its lands, is a rich experience for the serious Bible student. *Rise, and walk the land* – not just casually, to see the sites, but to sense, and even to participate in, the unfolding of tribal destiny within the twelve *naḥalot*.

This book is a series of character composites of the twelve sons of Jacob. Each analysis is followed by an exposition of each *naḥalah* and suggestions for conceptual connections between tribe and territory. Additionally, a day-tour itinerary of each

naḥalah is provided, as are my personal reflections on getting the most out of those sites.

The chapters are not organized by birth order, but rather by birth mother. That is, all of Leah's children are grouped together, despite the chronological interlude in their births of sons born to Rachel's, and then Leah's, handmaids. The children born to Rachel herself are in birth order, of course, as they were the youngest of all.

It is important to note that I devote a chapter to Levi, despite the fact that this tribe received no specific regional apportionment, but only inherited cities scattered throughout the land. In that chapter, I address the issue of why this tribe was not given a contiguous *naḥalah*. I also assigned a chapter to Joseph, though his portion was represented through the *naḥalot* of his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. It is impossible to fully treat the *Benei Yisrael* without giving Levi and Joseph their due.

So as to best understand the relationship of each tribe to its *naḥalah*, each chapter opens with a discourse on the character of the tribe. These are analyses woven together from classical Jewish sources: the Bible, midrashic works, the Talmud, medieval exegetes, and modern commentaries. My fondness for other ancient sources is manifest throughout these pages. I trust my instincts, though you shouldn't necessarily. I am confident that others may well draw different conclusions from the same texts. I therefore provide citations within the footnotes, as well as some scholarly excursions for those interested.

A word here on sources: certainly we find an established hierarchy within Jewish literature, whereby one source dominates another in its importance and weightiness. A Talmudic statement, for instance, is of more consequence than a medieval midrash. That is not of particular concern to these discussions, as I readily present *Midrash Tanḥuma* alongside a teaching of *Sefat Emet* and trust the reader to discern and decide for him or herself their rela-

tive authority and purpose. This is not the forum to introduce the source material that I have used, nor is it the place to discourse on the relative significance of each source. I have included a list of primary sources for the first purpose; as to the second, I leave that heavy task to those more capable.⁷

The Sages were the most nuanced readers of all, both transmitting traditions about how to read the text and revealing subtleties that the less-trained or accomplished might miss. I have traced the characters, insofar as I have been able, within the Bible, drawing primarily from the wealth of rabbinic literature and considering midrash an indispensable and integral element of my enterprise.

The treatment of the *naḥalot* in these pages is not meant to substitute for a thorough geographical discussion of the borders between the tribes, nor does it address at length the complexities of conflicting textual versions of just what those borders were. I have included one excursus relating to the latter issue as an exercise in demonstrating different approaches to the problems inherent in variant textual traditions.⁸ Note that some of these topics may be touched upon in other chapters as well, but the purpose of *naḥalah* discussion in this work is non-scientific.

The day-tour itineraries were designed as an accompaniment to the character portraits. Certainly there are many additional sites in every *naḥalah* that are well worth a visit. As the essayist

7. For brief descriptions of the different sources cited in this book, see Eyal Ben Eliyahu, Yehuda Cohn, and Fergus Millar, *Handbook of Jewish Literature from Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). For a more thorough discussion of taxonomy within rabbinic literature, see Shmuel Safrai, ed. *The Literature of the Sages*, 2 vols. (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 1987–2006) and Hermann L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to Talmud and Midrash*. 2d ed. (Translated by Markus Bockmuehl), (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996). For a taxonomy of midrashic literature, see ענת ריזל, מבוא למדרשים (תבונות - מכללת הרצוג 2010).

8. See chapter 2, “Excursus: Textual Evidence for Boundary Determination of *Naḥalat Rewen*.”

Mark Twain opined, the sheer concentration of antiquities in the Holy Land proves positively exhausting to the traveler.⁹ Consider my touring suggestions as only the first of many possible ways to explore the intrinsic connections between each *shevet* and its *naḥalah*.

A WORD ON USAGE

I was nourished on the milk-and-honey sweetness of the Hebrew Bible in my youth, but my more serious exposure to the gamut of source material began in the university. I returned to the *kotelei beit ha-midrash*, and ever since, I have been exploring multidisciplinary approaches to *talmud Torah*. I fully appreciate that this varied background makes for a somewhat uneven terminology.

You will find some idiosyncrasies in translation and transliteration in these pages. Biblical names and places appear in their English form. All spellings of historical place names, including tels or ruins, follow *Atlas Carta*. When I refer to the modern place, however, I follow the contemporary convention. The books of the Bible are known by their common English titles as well, as are some other source materials, but rabbinic texts are identified by their Hebrew titles. Biblical translations are based on the *New Jewish Publication Society of America Tanakh*, but I have taken liberties as I deemed fit. The Hebrew letter ך is transliterated as *h*, and כ as *kh*. I have included a glossary of commonly used Hebrew terms, as well as a list of all primary sources referenced in the footnotes.

9. “How it wears a man out to have to read to up a hundred pages of history every two or three miles – for verily the celebrated localities of Palestine occur that close together. How wearily, how bewilderingly they swarm about your path!” *The Innocents Abroad* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1922), 232.

The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel (he was the firstborn, but when he defiled his father's marriage bed, his rights as firstborn were given to the sons of Joseph son of Israel; so he could not be listed in the genealogical record in accordance with his birthright, and though Judah was the strongest of his brothers and a ruler came from him, the rights of the firstborn belonged to Joseph) – the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel: Enoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi.

I Chronicles 5:1–3

